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ABSTRACT

Studies have indicated that mature women maintain a permanent role identity along two dimensions, i.e., traditional women or nontraditional women. However, the lifeset of many mature adult women may be on the continuum between these two positions, i.e., in the position of "deferred achiever." The personality variables and sex-role orientations of a group of 72 women over age 30, classified as either traditional homemakers or reentry college students were investigated. Data on sex-role orientation revealed that traditional homemakers were more intra-family-oriented, while reentry women were more extra-family-oriented. Traditional women held conservative views about women's role in society; reentry women held more liberal views. Personality measures revealed that traditional women scored higher in socialization, femininity, and low risk-taking behaviors; reentry women scored significantly higher on capacity for status, sociability, social presence, achievement, intellectual efficiency, psychological-mindedness, flexibility, and autonomous behavior. Reentry women appeared to form a third category of mature women in transition from a traditional to a nontraditional position. (NRB)

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COMPARISON OF SEX-ROLE ORIENTATION AND PERSONALITY VARIABLES IN TRADITIONAL WOMEN AND COLLEGE RE-ENTRY WOMEN

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The sex-role stereotypic view of the traditional woman describes her characteristics through a warm, gentle and expressive cluster which reflects attributes of tactfulness, religiousness, neatness, quietness, interest in art and literature and the ability to express tender feelings (Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz & Vogel, 1970). The acceptance of this view appears to be widely held (Seward, 1946), persistent (Fernberger, 1948), and highly structured to a specific pattern (Komarovsky, 1959) which is believed to be true not only by males, but also by many females, regardless of their socioeconomic rank or religious belief (Rosenkrantz, 1965). Bem and Bem (1970) has formalized this attitude as "the unconscious ideology of training women to know their place."

Whereas femininity and masculinity are viewed by society as mutually exclusive, society appears to place a premium on masculine characteristics. These include assertiveness, independence, self-confidence and ambition (Broverman, et al., 1970), and in general, being an achiever. Previous studies have indicated that mature women maintain a permanent role identity along two dimensions only: as traditional women; or as nontraditional women. The nontraditional woman closely

resembles the profile attributed to achievers, which is similar to masculine characteristics. The "ideal woman" of society may be viewed as a traditionalist, who is less aggressive, less independent, less active, more emotional, and less able to make decisions, when compared to males or nontraditional females. Horner (1968) stated that women who incorporate these stereotypic traditional feminine value often have a poor mental health profile, because these values have not been cited by mental health professionals as traits indicative of good mental health (Neulinger, 1968).

The traditional woman, as thus defined, appears to have relinquished her expression of competency and achievement motivated behavior in order to assume her proper role. Cues to this proper role began early in adolescence, where actions aimed at femininity rather than achievement, places a contingency upon her to conform (Angrist, 1969). This contingency appears to be very marked by the college years and Komarovsky (1959) states that girls in the latter years of college, experience a sudden reversal in what their parents applaud them for--achievement via personal and career--oriented behavior versus the traditional role. Thus, women become defined along these two dimentions as either a traditional or nontraditional woman.

Studies have applied descriptive titles to women at each end of the female continuum which serve as labels by which society can determine which social role is applicable. Some of the labels for traditional women are: other-oriented (Fand, 1955); conventional (Holland, 1966); noncommitted careerwise (Harmon, 1970); homemaker (Westervelt, 1973); traditional (Tangri, 1975); and caregivers (Sheely, 1976). Labels applied to nontraditional women are: achievers (Lesser, 1963); intellectual (Holland, 1966); career committed (Harmon, 1970); defectors (Astin, 1971); competitors (Hawley, 1972); committed (Westervelt, 1973); role-innovators (Tangri, 1975); and deferred nurturers (Sheely, 1976). Nontraditional women appear to have received acceptance as achieving members of society.

Statement of the Problem

The labels of traditional and nontraditional, infer a permanent lifeset for women. The present study examines the possibility that women are not set, but may be somewhere on the continuum between the two stated positions, and many are currently redefining themselves through the pursuit of personal achievement. Many of these women are returning to school as the older-than-average student.

These re-entry women or "deferred achievers" (Sheeley, 1976) appear to have only interrupted or deferred their career drive (Westervelt, 1973) and at a specific time in their cognitive development process, recommit themselves to the world. High achievement needs present before career deferrment reappear and return to their previous level (Schlossberg, 1977).

The three most salient problems for these women appear to be: (1) low self-confidence; (2) time management; and, (3) role conflict. Role conflict issues involve assuming the attitude that the roles of wife, mother and student are not incompatible (Likert, 1967). No longer a strict adherent to the traditional role, these women appear to be embarking not only on a new self definition, but offer a challenge to the stereotypic definitions of all women. Little has been done to examine the personality variables and sex-role orientation of these women, therefore, this has been the purpose of the present study.

Method

The seventy-two subjects, ages 30 and above, were divided into two groups: (1) traditional women--if they were not currently enrolled in school, and whose primary occupation was that of a housewife; and, (2) re-entry woman--

if they were currently enrolled in college. The two groups were matched on age, race, level of education, and years out of school. The subjects were volunteers who responded to a letter which was sent to all women, over the age of 30, who were currently enrolled at the University, and to members of women's organizations in the local community.

Instruments

All the women took the following test battery which consisted of: (1) sex-role orientation measures--(A). The Male and Female Role Research Inventory of Feminine values (MAFERR), which examines perceptions of the female role, intra-family versus extra-family orientation and the female's perception of man's ideal woman; (B). The Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS), which examines the attitudes of the subjects toward the rights and role of women in contemporary society; and (2) personality instruments--(A). The California Personality Inventory (CPI), which is useful in assessing normal personality styles; (B). The Personality Research Form (PRF), which provides a description of trait adjectives.

Statistics

The test batteries were scored by hand, adhering to

the procedures specified in the test manuals. Raw scores were used on the AWS and MAFERR, but the CPI and PRF scores were converted into standard scores, in order to be compared to norms established for these instruments. Statistical analysis was performed to determine significant differences in the scores due to the status (traditional or re-entry) of the subjects. The following statistics were applied to the data: Discriminant analysis; t-tests; and Anova.

Results

The results of the sex-role orientation measures indicate that for these subjects, the traditional women were personally more intra-family oriented, their ideal woman was more intra-family oriented and their perception of man's ideal woman was very intra-family oriented, while the re-entry women viewed themselves and their ideal woman as more extra-family oriented, they nevertheless viewed man's ideal woman as somewhat intra-family oriented, but less so than the traditional woman's view. The traditional women appeared to hold conservative views on the role of women in contemporary society, while the re-entry women were more liberal in their attitudes on the roles for women.

There were significant differences between the women in the two groups on personality measures. Traditional

women received higher scores, indicating their strengths, on scales which measured socialization, femininity and low risk taking behavior. The re-entry women were significantly higher on scales which measured capacity for status, sociability, social presence, achievement, intellectual efficiency, psychological mindedness, flexibility and autonomous behavior.

The results of the discriminate analysis provided further information on factors which define the group membership. Traditional women were identified with a 91.7% prediction rate, while re-entry women were identified with a 97.2% prediction rate, as a result of the factors taken from the battery. (See Table)

Discussion

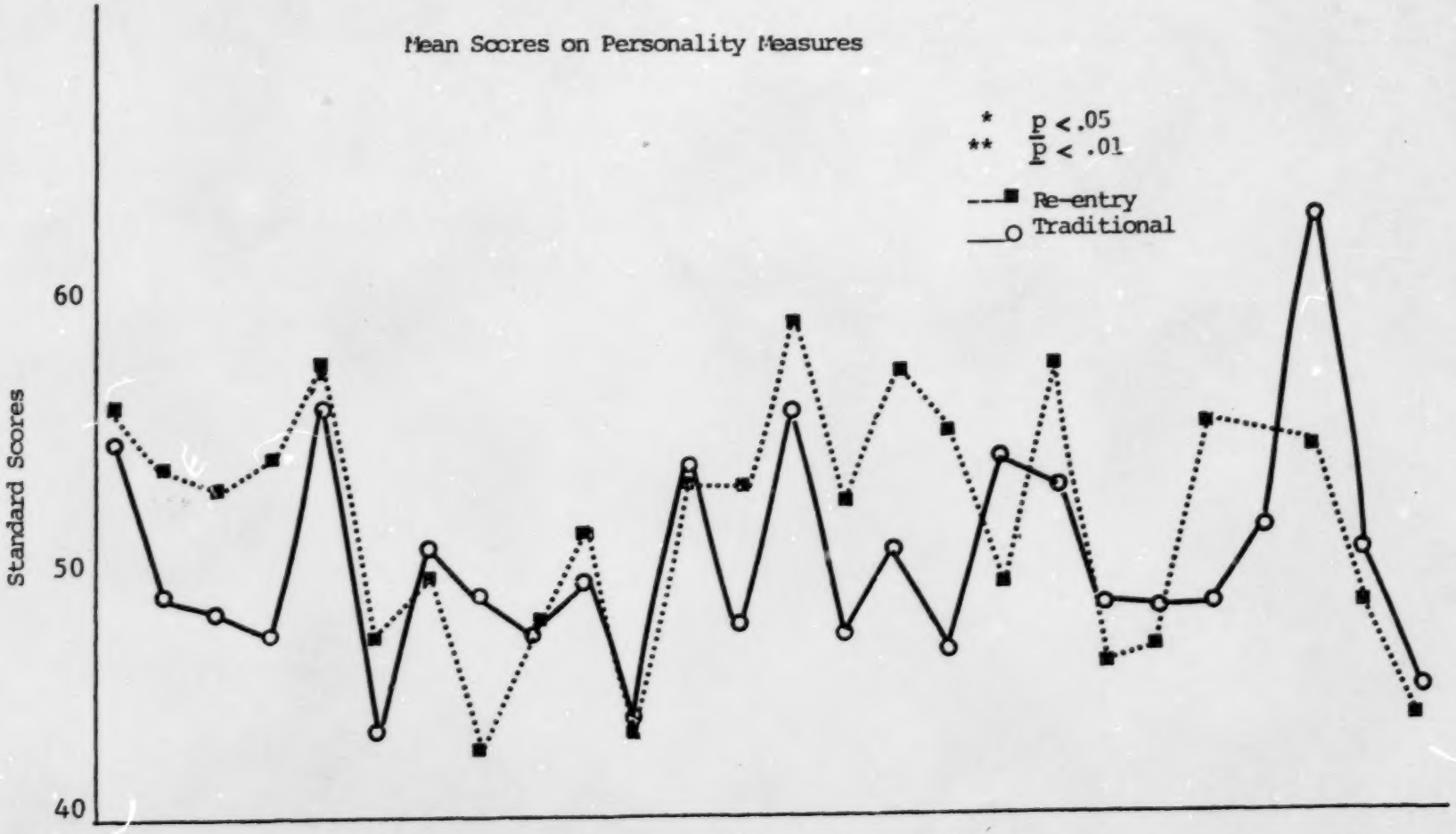
The present study appeared to polarize these women into two groups which were well defined and different. While the traditional women appear to closely resemble societies stereotypic woman whose role was defined around a "feminine-social" cluster of traits, the re-entry women, who formally came from this same group, no longer adhere to this role model. The re-entry women appear to define themselves in a more compentent way with traits which cluster around achievement potential, intellectual interests

and efficiency as well as interpersonal adequacy. These re-entry women closely resemble nontraditional women in their self-description and their attitudes toward women's roles in society.

The re-entry phenonema of these "delayed achievers" offers a challenge to educators, not only for improvement in societies definition of women generally, but for those who re-enter college after an absence of many years, to receive help for their special interests and needs. Paramount in these needs, is vocational counseling, child care programs, self-esteem programs and more campus recognition.

Future studies should include more women who are single, black, divorced and widowed. A longitudinal study which would offer the battery to high school girls in their Senior year and a follow up battery some years later, would be useful as a predictive measure for women who should consider returning to school on the basis of group membership. Future studies may also include a definition of the nontraditional woman on these same instruments. Finally, with more research, perhaps more insight can be provided mental health workers concerning the characteristics of the optimally integrated woman.

FIGURE 1


Mean Scores on Personality Measures
* p < .05
** p < .01
Re-entry
Traditional
Standard Scores
60
50
40
DO CS* SY* SP* SA WB RE SO**SC TC GI CM AC**AI IE**PY**FX**FE* AC AF AG AU* DO HA**NU PI
CPI
PRF
CPI and PRF Personality Measures

Prediction Results of Discriminant

Analysis for Status

Actual Group	No. of Cases	Predicted Traditional	%	Predicted Re-Entry No.	%
Traditional	36	33	91.7	3	8.3
Re-entry	36	1	2.8	35	97.2

Percent of "grouped" cases correctly classified = 94.4%

Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients

Symbol	Variable	Function 1
MS	Marital Status	0.1849
AGEO	Age of Oldest	0.2116
Wb	Well Being	0.3451
SO	Socialization	-0.1751
SC	Self-Control	-0.2109
TO	Tolerance	-0.4902
CM	Communality	0.1323
AC	Achievement via Conformance	0.3110
FX	Flexibility	0.5783
AC	Achievement	0.2170
AF	Affiliation	-0.1960
AG	Aggression	-0.2730
AWS	Attitude Toward Women in Society	0.3938

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